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ABSTRACT

This special report is a collection of seven essays exploring issues in professional development and teacher improvement: (1) "The Missing Link" (Ann Bradley) looks at the elements of effective staff development and new attention fotused on teachers' on-the-job training; (2) "Union Dues" (Jeanne Ponessa) examines the role of unions in professional development; (3) "Money Talks" (Drew Lindsay) is a case study of a plan by the school district in Flint (Michigan) to reform professional development and improve student learning by turning much of the money and control of staff development over to school principals; (4) "Teacher to Teacher" (Joanna Richardson) discusses how networks based on teachers' interests and experiences offer a strategy for improving teachers' knowledge; (5) "A Virtual Network" (Peter West) explores how easy-access electronic tools provide teachers a support system for professional development; (6) "The Long Haul" (Ann Bradley) is a case study of two trainers with the Public Education and Business Coalition, a nonprofit organization in Denver (Colorado) that brings five school districts together with business and community groups; and (7) "Let the Buyer Beware" in which 10 teachers relate their professional development experiences. (ND)

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Inquiring Minds: Creating a Nation of Teachers as Learners. An *Education Week* Special Report

Education Week, Supplement

April 17, 1996

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Education Week
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This disk contains all of the articles and charts from Education Week's special report "Inquiring Minds: Creating a Nation of Teachers as Learners" which was published April 17, 1996. This report examines the professional development of teachers, what good training is and isn't, how schools pay for it, and what teachers themselves say about it.

The special report was made possible by a grant from the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation.

INQUIRING MINDS

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Many teachers cringe at the mention of professional development. But education reformers have begun to pay more attention to teachers' on-the-job training.

UNION DUES (file name is 02union)

Union leaders are catching on. They know that teachers want their membership fees to go toward more than contract negotiations and benefits packages. Their members want help becoming better teachers, too.

MONEY TALKS (file name is 03flint)

After years of nickel and diming professional development, officials in Flint, Mich., have decided to put their money where their mouth is. They have set out to revolutionize student learning by rethinking staff training.

TEACHER TO TEACHER (file name is 04net)

Coming in all shapes and sizes--and available to match almost any interest--teacher networks offer a promising strategy for improving classroom instruction.

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Denver-area teachers say the in-depth training they've been receiving over the past decade has paid large dividends for their students and their schools.

LET THE BUYER BEWARE (file name is 07buy)

When it comes to investing scarce time and money in professional development, many teachers warn that the customer doesn't always get what he pays for.

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Inquiring Minds: The Missing Link

By Ann Bradley

Like most teachers, Maggie Brown Cassidy doesn't have to be prodded to tell a horror story about professional development.

Once, Cassidy sat through a presentation about the detrimental health effects of drugs and alcohol. It included a film strip that showed an autopsy. All Cassidy could think about was the wheezing teacher next to her, a heavy smoker, and how uncomfortable the session must have made him feel.

"It was just one of those mandates, that teachers need to have a certain number of hours of instruction in certain areas," recalls Cassidy, who teaches secondary French in Brattleboro, Vt. "It was done in a very insensitive way. And it needed to be so general that it was pretty much a waste of everybody's time."

Cassidy is fortunate to have moved on to richer, more rewarding experiences in her career. But too many teachers have not. Most roll their eyes at having to submit to "in-services" or "staff development" on the latest hot topic, often determined by administrators or state legislators.

Teachers also take university or college classes, of course, earning credits that bring them extra pay. But often, their studies are not related to the subject they teach. Many times, they pursue degrees in administration or counseling in hopes of advancing out of the classroom.

On this wobbly base rests nothing less than the nation's hopes for improving its education system. Schools are only as good as their teachers, regardless of how high their standards, how up-to-date their technology, or how innovative their programs. If teachers aren't given adequate opportunities to learn, they have little chance of meeting the ever-increasing demands placed upon them.

The growing realization that professional-development practices are badly out of sync with the reform agenda is spurring widespread interest in rethinking teachers' on-the-job learning.

Major foundations are now investing heavily in funding promising practices and sponsoring studies of professional development. Teachers' learning tops the U.S. Department of Education's priorities. Both of the national teachers' unions plan to weigh in with major reports on the topic this summer. And this fall, the National Commission on Teaching and America's Future--a 26-member blue-ribbon panel funded by the Rockefeller Foundation and the Carnegie Corporation of New York--is expected to make recommendations on strengthening professional development over teachers' entire careers.

"It's the missing link," says Joseph C. Vaughan, the coordinator of professional development in the Education Department's office of educational research and improvement. "We've talked about curriculum and assessments and standards--everything but human

resources and support. That's how institutions change."

The job of teaching must be redefined to include continuous learning, argues Judith A. Rényi, the executive director of the National Foundation for the Improvement of Education at the National Education Association. Teachers are now expected to educate all students to a level once reached by only about 20 percent of students, she points out, in a multilingual, multicultural society undergoing rapid technological change.

At the same time, teachers increasingly are being called on to become decisionmakers and school leaders, without adequate preparation for these roles.

"There isn't any amount of education in the world that can prepare you to do all that," Rényi says. "You're never done learning."

Although many educators and researchers lament the prevalence of inadequate, superficial programs foisted on teachers, a consensus is emerging about the principles of effective approaches to professional development. (See Chart, Page 11.)

The success of teacher networks and school-university collaboratives is a bright spot helping spur new ways of thinking about professional development.

First, teachers should be involved in planning their own learning experiences, not just passive recipients of knowledge. Second, they need to be linked to a larger "learning community" that can bring in expertise and ideas to complement their work. And third, professional development must be better balanced between meeting the needs of individual teachers and advancing the organizational goals of their schools and districts.

"While everybody talks about how bad things are, in some ways, they may never have been better," says Thomas B. Corcoran of the University of Pennsylvania, the co-director of the Consortium for Policy Research in Education's policy center. "We now have some models and successes."

Despite the enthusiasm some of these projects have generated, there isn't much research evidence about them. The John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur and Spencer foundations are seeking to fill the void with a grant program targeted at identifying effective practices and exploring why they work and how they can be replicated.

But that will be just a first step toward overhauling the professional development of practicing teachers. State policymakers need to examine the rewards and incentives that govern the current haphazard system, experts say. Corcoran recommends that they look at aid to higher education, accreditation, requirements for teacher licensure and relicensure, and teacher-compensation structures to "deliver a consistent message" about professional development.

Now, state and local policies create strong incentives for teachers to be "active consumers of workshops and conferences," he says. Salary schedules in most districts give teachers more money for taking classes or earning "continuing-education units" for various activities. And state relicensure policies mirror these incentives, with requirements for more CEUs or master's degrees.

A multimillion-dollar industry supplies the workshops, in-services, and half-day training sessions that characterize so much professional development. While some of this fare does the job, Corcoran says, much is "intellectual junk food."

Some 80 percent of professional development money is controlled by local districts. Typically, the responsibility for professional development falls on a busy administrator with other duties who can most easily fulfill requirements by calling in an outside expert.

What these consultants or staff developers have to offer may or may not be particularly relevant to teachers. And it may or may not have any connection with a school or district's larger goals, whether it be for the development of its employees or the achievement of its students.

Typically, teachers are simply exposed to a particular concept or practice in a short-term fashion. Rarely are they helped to think about what it might mean for their classroom or supported as they try something new with their students.

"Teachers often have wonderful opportunities in terms of content," says A. Richardson Love Jr., the director of the education program at the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation in Miami. "It's the application that's missing."

The smartest programs, Love says, are those that offer teachers group training and orientation and then follow-up and technical assistance in the classroom, including observation, feedback, and work with master teachers who serve as mentors. These approaches make professional development a resource, he says, and not just a burden.

In addition to such help, teachers also need opportunities to learn by performing tasks once considered the domain of administrators, including serving on curriculum committees, developing new assessments, conducting research, and helping their peers hone their practice.

Policymakers should consider giving teachers credit for these broader activities that develop their knowledge and skills, experts advise, and pay close attention to the quality of the menu of offerings approved for credit. Some states have increased the amount of money devoted to professional development or paid for extra pupil-free days for teachers, only to find that they have invested in the "same old, same old," Corcoran reports.

Although the temptation may be strong to offer teachers training to introduce a particular reform, the best bet in the long run is to invest in activities that develop teachers' overall capacity, advises G. Williamson McDiarmid, the co-director of the National Center for Research on Teacher Learning at Michigan State University.

A deep knowledge of the subject she teaches, for example, is "absolutely critical" to a teacher's ability to reach all her students, McDiarmid points out. Investing in teachers' subject-matter knowledge is also a wise move because the political winds shift so rapidly in education.

"Today's hot new policy is tomorrow's political road kill," McDiarmid cautions.

For professional development to become woven into the fabric of a teacher's job, rather than squeezed in after school or on weekends, schools must rethink their use of time. In this country, teachers spend the vast majority of their working time engaged with students. Studies have shown that Japanese, Chinese, and most European teachers have substantial time built into their regular workday for preparation, curriculum development, and working with their colleagues.

Eventually, Rényi of the NEA says, the school year for teachers may have to be lengthened to 11 months instead of 10 to create more time for professional development. Two weeks of the additional month, she suggests, could be for staff development "determined by the school group, for the group."

Many schools are reconsidering their schedules and resources to enable their teachers to engage in productive learning activities. Some use block scheduling to create common planning time for teachers, while others schedule early-release days for students. The trend toward having students do community service and independent projects also holds promise for creating time for teachers to learn on the job.

In the Mesa Unified School District in Mesa, Ariz., community volunteers have been trained to teach mini-units in science so teams of teachers can be released from their classrooms to work together.

"Teachers need the chance to dialogue and reflect with one another," says Joanne Vasquez, the incoming president of the National Science Teachers Association. Vasquez, who notes that the new national science standards heavily emphasize teachers' learning, hopes to make the NSTA a professional-development broker, provider, and clearinghouse.

While new arrangements clearly are necessary, districts and schools also can make better use ofexisting positions. High school department chairs, for example, can play leadership roles in professional development.

In the long run, public attitudes may be the greatest barrier to restructuring schools to create ways for teachers to learn on the job. Most Americans believe that teachers are working only when they are with children, and many parents are resent-ful of efforts to free up time for teachers to meet.

Focus groups conducted last year for the National Education Association by Public Agenda, a New York City-based research group, found that participants were unaware of the need for professional development for teachers. Once the issue was clarified, however, they became supportive, but they also "expect professional development to lead to quick, significant, and measurable payoffs in student achievement."

That is unlikely to happen, however. Learning to teach in new ways, research has shown, is a long- term, developmental process that involves much more than being exposed to a topic and being expected to usher it into the classroom. Finding ways to create new arrangements that will meet teachers' needs is critical.

"Teachers themselves agree that their preparation has been inadequate and the current system of in-services is inadequate," Rényi says. "They're desperate for help."

In this special report, underwritten by the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation, we will examine the strengths and weaknesses of teacher networks and why many are interested in creating them.

We'll size up the vital role that teachers' unions could play--and are starting to play--in advocating and providing for their members' continued learning.

Because technology holds such promise for bringing teachers together, we'll review projects that use it as a vehicle for professional development.

We'll visit Flint, Mich., where educators are scrutinizing how they spend their professional-development dollars. Ultimately, they hope to create a coherent plan that will support learning systemwide.

And we will take a close-up look at Cottonwood Creek Elementary School outside of Denver, where teachers are engaged in long-term, in-depth learning experiences that pay off for students.

Finally--and perhaps most important--we'll listen to what practicing teachers have to say about their opportunities to learn and grow in their work. Their frustration and hopes should provide a guide for those interested in helping them do their jobs better.

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Inquiring Minds: Union Dues
By Jeanne Ponessa

This summer, both the National Education Association and the American Federation of Teachers plan to make a splash with major policy recommendations for how unions can increase their role in professional development.

The question for national leaders is not whether unions should take more responsibility for developing their members' knowledge and skills, but how. They know full well that education reform is putting unprecedented pressure on teachers. Increasingly, they hear requests for assistance from members looking to unions for help with problems of practice, not just benefits and grievances.

And by embracing professional development as a new role, the national unions could take another step toward forging new organizations that reflect the complexity of teaching. Leaders acknowledge that in the late 1990s, industrial-style unionism is a poor fit with the movement to give teachers more leadership and decisionmaking roles in their schools and districts.

But it is also true that, in some districts, union practices themselves are a major barrier to improving professional development.

Contracts can put strict limits on teachers' activities. Some teachers, steeped in the union mentality, resist putting forth any extra effort if they are not paid for each

hour of their time. In the worst cases, teachers walk out of workshops when they've put in their allotted time for the day. Eagle-eyed shop stewards in schools also can discourage willing teachers from getting together with colleagues if it means violating contract rules.

Keith B. Geiger, the president of the NEA, admits that too-rigid contracts can harm teachers more than help them, especially as they are expected to take on more tasks.

"There's no question that the policies that we have in our contracts were bargained for some very good reasons, but it's now 1996," he says. "In the whole shared-decisionmaking process, all of us have to look at more flexibility."

The NEA's National Foundation for the Improvement of Education is preparing a report to be released at the association's annual Representative Assembly in July. The document, in the works for two years, will review exemplary programs and approaches and include policy recommendations.

Albert Shanker, the president of the American Federation of Teachers, also plans to call for unions to take on a larger role in teacher training and retraining at the AFT's convention this summer.

"The bottom line is that teachers' unions can no longer thrive if

they ignore the professional needs of their members," says Adam Urbanski, the president of the Rochester Teachers Association, an AFT affiliate in New York. "The newer members lookto the union, and expect it to pay as much attention to their professional needs as to the bread-and-butter issues."

Urbanski, whose union has crafted a number of professional-development projects, points out that taking responsibility for members' knowledge and skills forces unions to take a different attitude, focusing on quality control and enforcement of standards.

"We can no longer say, 'You are right because you pay dues.' We have to say, 'We have standards, we don't want you in our union,'" says Urbanski, who has won re-election to his post every two years since 1981. "And surprise, surprise, you don't get impeached or assassinated when you take that position. Good teachers feel very frustrated or get angry when uncaring or incompetent colleagues continue."

In 1993, the Rochester Teachers Association launched the Leadership for Reform Institute with funds generated by a membership-dues increase. The institute publishes a pedagogical journal called Raising Standards, provides grant-writing assistance to teachers, and sponsors seminars and workshops on teaching and professionalism.

The union also holds an annual conference on instructional issues, at which nearly 1,700 teachers are expected this year. For those who can't attend, the district has agreed to televise portions of the conference.

The Minneapolis Federation of Teachers also has been at the forefront of promoting professional development. The federation's new contract includes a 20-page section on the topic, including a mentor program for teachers, a districtwide staff-development advisory committee made up mostly of teachers, and salary advancements tied to certification by the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards.

Though the federation had developed various projects over the past few years, says union president Louise Sundin, the programs were offered in a "piecemeal" fashion.

"We finally decided we needed to put it all in writing, in one place, and in a place where teachers trusted," Sundin says.

The union had an advantage in working with the 47,000-student district, she says, because its desire to create professional-development programs outlasted a string of several superintendents and administrations.

"We've kept a pretty consistent vision of where we wanted to go to professionalize teaching," Sundin says. "We think the union has a responsibility and a role in training teachers for the profession."

But teachers' unions can face roadblocks in taking on these new responsibilities when districts are reluctant to give up control or when poor labor relations poison a cooperative atmosphere.

Administrators in the San Diego Unified School District, for example, balked at the San Diego Teachers Association's request to negotiate a permanent council to oversee professional

development. The issue was one sore point in a five-day strike in February.

The district argued, and the union later consented, that teachers should develop the project through a separate "memorandum of understanding" rather than through their labor contract.

In Poway, Calif., a 29,000-student district with a reputation for innovative approaches to professional development, a yearlong contract struggle has put many programs on hold.

The Poway Federation of Teachers had helped create a peer-evaluation program for new and experienced teachers and an intervention plan for troubled tenured teachers. Poway also offered a mentor-teacher program, which a union-district panel oversees. And Poway educators had just formed a professional-development governing board, with five union and four district representatives.

But because of the tough negotiations, says union President Don Raczka, everything except the new teachers' peer-review plan has been shelved.

Raczka says it was "gut-wrenching" to see programs he had helped create die. But it was impossible to maintain the needed level of cooperation with the district while haggling over a contract.

"You can't be in a dispute and hold hands and skip along a path at the same time," Raczka notes ruefully.

Too often, school districts offer programs that aren't helpful for teachers and then treat teachers' requests to create their own as a bargaining issue, observes Ellen Dempsey, the president of IMPACT II, a national nonprofit group that funds and coordinates teacher-developed projects.

"For the school systems to look at it as something they're giving to the teachers, rather than something they're giving to the kids, is a ridiculous way to look at it," Dempsey argues.

Rochester's Urbanski agrees--and that's why he says collaboration on professional development has to parallel working together on collective bargaining.

The Rochester school system and the RTA have retained a Massachusetts-based conflict-management firm to work toward "win-win" bargaining that benefits both sides.

"We have to invent ways to protect the new work of teachers' unions and school districts from the old hazards," Urbanski says. "Neither the interest of the union nor the district is considered to be the priority. The priority is what's best for the kids."

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Inquiring Minds: Money Talks
By Drew Lindsay

Flint, Mich.

Jeff Bean speaks slowly and evenly, his words anchored in bass tones that inspire thoughtful reflection, not passion. But there's no mistaking what this mild-mannered, 40-year-old high school social-studies teacher is saying. He is talking about mutiny.

A year ago, school officials here discovered that their patch-work of professional development--workshops, seminars, conferences, in-services, and other ad hoc training--was costing a fortune. The professional-development department itself spent less than $300,000 a year. But the district's total investment climbed to nearly $13 million--or about 6 percent of its annual budget--when the number crunchers pooled the pockets of staff-training dollars scattered throughout the budget.

Now, Bean is one of the leaders of the district's effort to put that money to better use. In a seemingly endless round of meetings over the next year, educators hope to plot a way to revolutionize student learning by revolutionizing professional development. The blueprint so far calls for central-office staff to turn much of the control and money for staff training over to school principals and teachers them-selves. Academic standards that teams of parents, educators, and administrators will devise would guide staff training, not the dictum of a central-office bureaucrat. Indeed, Flint aims eventually to dismantle its whole power and budget structures.

The change promises to be big. "We have to do something dramatic," says Pamela Loving, the vice president of Flint's school board. "It has to be something that everybody feels in their gut and that everybody is terrified about. I want everybody to be truly terrified."

But in education, a field where a droning meeting can pass as bold action, talk is cheap. And even though Bean has pitched in to plan these changes, he is suspicious that Flint officials won't back up their words with action. As a test, he put a question to the district's superintendent, James Ray. If Flint's district rank and file decided that they no longer needed a superintendent, Bean asked, would he be willing to step down?

This is what it has come to in Flint. In a city built on the success of the automotive assembly line, schools are test-driving anarchy and the notion that professional development can leverage change in an urban school system.

Flint in recent years has been a school system eager to embrace change. The birthplace of General Motors, the city faced a host of social and economic woes with the automotive giant's painful decline in the 1980s. The list of reforms recently installed in city schools includes site-based management, outcomes-based education, and multi-age teaching.

Although still new, none of these has proved the salve for Flint's problems, which are myriad and typical of an urban district. Flint students' performance on Michigan's standardized tests hovers in the lowest quartile among the 21 districts that make up Genesee County. Three charter schools are also scheduled to open next fall in the city, and their success could force some of the community's schools to shape up or shut down.

"This is a system ripe for change," says Ada Washington, a Flint parent and former teacher.

Until recently, though, no one saw professional development as much of a change agent. Different departments planned staff training on their own, with little thought to the district's goals. As recently as four years ago, the sole effort to put all the district's 3,000 staff members on the same page was a single all-day workshop held once a year. So few dollars flowed to professional development that Flint officials never bothered to coordinate their programs or measure their effectiveness. "We put so little into it, we didn't bother to see what we got out of it," district officials wrote in a grant proposal to the Rockefeller Foundation in New York City.

But with the help of Rockefeller officials, Flint administrators discovered last year that their investment in professional development was more than chump change. They inventoried the training dollars that the district spent as part of their grant proposal to redesign the district's professionaldevelopment.

While the central office boasted a professional-development office with a $287,000 budget, line items to pay for conferences, workshops, and travel for staff training were littered throughout the district's $205 million budget. There were 66 line items in all, from the $257,000 paid out through the school-improvement office to the $264 spent by a vocational-education program.

Lump sum, these pockets of money totaled nearly $2 million. Even more startling to Flint officials was the calculation of indirect professional-development costs: the university credit and degree payments the district made on behalf of staff; the salary paid to staff for in-service training; and the salaries paid to staff for preparing and leading professional-development activities.

With these costs factored in, Flint's estimated annual investment in professional development climbed to nearly $13 million, or about 6 percent of the district's budget. That surprised even Loving, who among board members is perhaps the biggest boosterof professional-development spending. She was appalled that so many dollars flowed to staff training with no assessment of results. "I told the staff, 'What do you mean $12 million,'" Loving remembers. "I was horrified by that."

With the inventory, Loving and her colleagues in Flint entered uncharted waters. Only a handful of researchers have documented the dollars going to professional development in schools. "It's hard to take stock of the total picture," says Brian Lord, a senior project director for the Education Development Center in Newton, Mass. "You walk into a district and ask what resources are available for professional development, and it's hard to find anyone who can give you a comprehensive answer."

Districts for the most part have little incentive to itemize and pool their professional-development dollars. Much of that funding comes from federal and state sources and is earmarked by

districts for specific training. Better to leave it scattered throughout the spending plan, making it a tough target for budget cutters, some school officials think.

Also, until recently, that money was seen more as a fringe benefit that had little role in advancing school reform. "We really didn't value professional development until recently," says Mary Fulton, a school-finance analyst at the Denver-based Education Commission on the States. "It was always kind of an extra, an add on."

But Flint and other districts taking part in the Rockefeller initiative have turned such conventional wisdom on its head. If districts define professional development broadly, as Flint did, schools are actually spending great sums of money on staff training. What's more, the dollars are not spent wisely. "The challenge is to get a grip on what resources are available for professional development and then direct them to what works," Fulton says.

With funding from the Rockefeller Foundation, Flint officials will wrestle over the next year with how to make better use of their $13 million investment in professional development. But in doing so, they aim to redesign the district's entire structure so teachers and principals become key players in all instructional decisions.

"That's a novel idea," says Victor Young, the president of the Learning Communities Network in Cleveland and the director of the Rockefeller project. "There's an awful lot of national rhetoric to the effect that we need to turn control of schools over to teachers and principals, but it doesn't happen." On the rare occasion when it does, Young says, the transfer of power often comes with funding cuts, leaving school officials too busy filling budget holes to be innovative.

The key to the Flint plan is the designation of its four feeder systems as "learning zones," each with about 10 schools. Leaders within these zones include parents, teachers, principals, and central- office administrators who, together, would make instructional decisions for their zone's schools--including decisions about how to spend professional-development money. Freed from many top-down directives, the zone leaders would be guided in their decisions instead by academic standards that they played key roles in designing themselves.

The Flint plan remains a blueprint, but the strangeness of this new power-sharing has been acutely felt in each zone's first meetings. Before he was named to one of the zones, James Yantz, the district's business manager, had little to do with instructional issues. "Teachers have found out there is a person attached to the name that appears on their paycheck every two weeks," he says. "And that person has some ideas and can contribute."

Zone meetings are envisioned as salon-like sessions where educators can talk about instructional approaches and sift through current thinking on teaching and learning. As a result, some zones have embarked on studies of such popular education works as Eric Jensen's The Learning Brain as a prelude to drafting their standards.

Bean, for one, is hungry for the chance to chew over different education approaches with his colleagues in the Whittier zone

where he is a leader. He moved to Flint four years ago after nearly a decade teaching in a Detroit-area parochial school "where you just didn't question anything. As long as you kept control in your classroom, you were doing OK."

In the Whittier zone, Bean and the 45 or so other zone leaders first tackled a study of U.S. Census data to get a handle on the demographics of the students in their schools. They also spent several sessions hashing out their views on the barriers to learning. In February, they launched into their first discussion of the standards-based reform movement.

"This is powerful stuff," says Linda Caine-Smith, a former elementary school principal who moved to the district office last year to help lead this project. "It is central-office administrators working with the people on the front line."

"I leave some of those meetings, and I feel like I've just put in a 14-hour day at work. All that groping and thinking, I'm just drained," says JoAnn Reed-Owens, a 15-year member of the school board who recently stepped down to become the district's first parent-involvement advocate.

Still, not all the sessions have generated such erudite discussions. Participants have grumbled that the central office needs to offer more direction. "Some people have said, 'Why don't we just hire a company to do this?'" says Caine-Smith, who is also in the Whittier zone. "Others just want to adopt the national standards already out there and be done with it."

After spending so many years being told what to do, some educators don't know how to think creatively.

"We're just like students in that sense," Bean says. "We are products of the public education system. If we know that there is a textbook for the course, we're going to turn to the back of the chapter, find the questions, and read the chapter only looking for the answers to those questions. We tell these kids that we want them to learn for the pleasure of learning, but we don't do that.

"Most people will work through this," he continues. "They know that if this truly works, it will benefit a lot of what they do, and it will make their job much more exciting."

Even though the zones are months away from deciding how to install standards or a new professional-development system, expectations are high that big change is in the making. "There's going to be a lot of breaking of bones and dishes and glasses," Loving says, "but I think on the other side of this, we're going to make a contribution not only to this community, but to education as a whole."

Already, educators in Flint are embracing their new clout. The last contract with the Flint teachers' union doubled in-service training to 18 half-days. In some schools, staff members are taking advantage of the extra time to work together on teaching practices for their students.

At Pierson Elementary School, more teachers are trying team-teaching and cooperative learning now that they have time to plan. Also, in-service workshops no longer demand an appearance by an outside expert, says Shelly Umphrey, a fourth-year teacher at the school. "We've always overlooked the fact that we have

experts already on staff," she explains. "Some of those expert speakers are very competent, but they may not have been in a classroom for 40 years. And they don't know your school and your kids."

Of course, the revolution in Flint still remains mostly talk. With federal and state budget cuts expected to hit the district hard, the day-to-day business of running the schools could easily move the initiative to the back burner. And even if a blueprint for change is readied, signing the public onto it could pose another problem. The district does boast a good record for public support--it has lost only one tax or bond referendum in almost 20 years--but ushering in reforms has not always gone smoothly.

Ada Washington says she put her 10-year-old son in a parochial school when the district turned to multi-age teaching. She supported the move and Flint's other reforms, but she feared he would get lost in the shuffle. "There was so much dissension between parents and teachers because of the change," she says. "The teachers didn't quite have the answers that parents wanted."

Flint's plan could also get hung up on the decisions about exactly how much control and money to turn over to the zones and the schools themselves. "Giving building-level educators control doesn't guarantee that they will make good decisions," says Lord of the Education Development Center. "There needs to be a balance."

Even Bean says he worries that the board and central office will ignore the work done at the zone level and install their own plan for standards and professional development. When he tested Superintendent Ray's resolve and asked if he were ready to give up his job, Bean says the response was not convincing. "He got real nervous and said, 'Well,I think that the state requires us to have a superintendent.'"

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Inquiring Minds: Teacher to Teacher

By Joanna Richardson

Joanna Richardson is a former staff writer for Education Week.

Sue Funk can remember a time when she was happy to teach her 8th-grade mathematics course the old drill-and-practice way.

The Columbus, Ga., teacher had been following that tradition for most of her 16-year career. "I didn't think I was doing a bad job," she says. "My professors had all taught me to do it that way."

But when Funk stumbled into a teachers' network a couple years back, everything started to change. She had planned to take just one course through the Columbus Regional Mathematics Collaborative, a network for teachers, professors, and other mathematicians that is housed at Columbus College. Instead, she found a professional support group that coaxed her to try her hand at new teaching methods.

Funk was skeptical at first. She came up with every excuse for why she couldn't make changes in her teaching. Too risky. Too much extra work. Too confusing for the students.

But after watching other teachers in the network use the methods in their own classrooms and hearing of their successes at workshops and seminars, she came around. Gradually, she added exercises involving manipulatives to her math class. Soon, she tried out problem-solving portfolios. And though Funk still felt unsure about the changes, she discovered that her students seemed to be enjoying themselves. Better yet, they showed a deeper understanding of math concepts.

Now, Funk regularly seeks advice and resources from the collaborative, whose roughly 2,000 members teach in schools as far as 65 miles from its headquarters at the college.

"If I didn't have that support, I wouldn't have tried any of this," she says now, satisfied with the pragmatic mix of old and new in her classroom.

Funk is one of thousands of teachers across the country who have joined a network--a professional community organized around subject matter, teaching approaches, or specific school reforms. Some networks have been initiated by foundations or education organizations, others by states or local groups. They range from the established, influential National Writing Project--a Berkeley, Calif.-based network that serves some 160,000 teachers--to efforts that appeal to a smaller slice of the teaching population, such as the regional networks run by the Foxfire National Programs in the rural South.

In the past decade, the popularity of these teacher-to-teacher networks has steadily grown--a testament to the demand for professional development that grows out of the teacher's own interests and experiences. Networks banish the traditional one-

size-fits-all approach to teacher learning and replace it with a rich mix of offerings run by teachers, for teachers.

"There's a democracy to this [movement] that transcends boundaries, in terms of 'I do research. You teach,'" points out Judith Rényi, the executive director of the National Foundation for the Improvement of Education, the grant-giving arm of the National Education Association. "I don't think that phenomenon has been repeated" in other kinds of professional development, says Rényi, a former director of the Collaboratives for Humanities and Arts Teaching, or CHART network.

As the number of teachers joining networks has mushroomed, the movement has caught the attention of scholars and policymakers searching for richer and more productive ways to provide in-depth learning experiences for practicing teachers.

As Funk's experience shows, networks provide teachers not just with new knowledge, but with a motivating and supportive environment in which to go about the risky business of changing their teaching. Networks respect teachers' expertise, allowing them to pool their knowledge and build new ideas about their craft together. They also offer teachers the opportunity to play leadership roles without having to leave the classroom for jobs in school administration.

There are no figures on how many teacher networks exist, although they number in the hundreds. Some are able to pay for full-time staff. Many hold annual meetings, publish newsletters and journals, and produce research on best practices. Members may stay in touch through electronic bulletin boards.

But as promising as they are, even their biggest admirers admit that networks have their pitfalls.

In a 1992 Phi Delta Kappan article, Ann Lieberman of Teachers College, Columbia University, and Milbrey W. McLaughlin of the Stanford University school of education note that the quality of the experiences provided by networks varies. Teachers aren't always able to transfer what they have learned to their own classrooms. And the work of some networks has not been evaluated enough, perhaps because such oversight destroys the sense of trust and support that the networks are built on.

"Without procedures for ongoing outside review, networks can fall prey to the myopia of unfamiliar practices and the misdirection of unchallenged assumptions," the authors note.

Whatever their shortcomings, networks have found a following in nearly every corner of the country.

"These networks have a legitimacy in the eyes of teachers that a lot of university kinds of things don't," says G. Williamson McDiarmid, the co-director of the National Center for Research on Teacher Learning at Michigan State University in East Lansing. "The feeling right now is that the more we could explore what the possibilities are for teacher networks around subject matter, the better off we might be."

Many educators trace the rise of networks since the 1970s to teachers' near-universal distaste for the ubiquitous, one-shot seminars offered by districts, state agencies, and consultants. If you aren't going to give us practical learning experiences, network founders said, we'll do it ourselves.

Teacher networks pride themselves on offering a wide variety of workshops, discussion groups, and other activities for teachers--provided primarily by teachers. Lieberman and McLaughlin call this a "Chinese menu" approach. The variety gives teachers "an important measure of flexibility and self-determination," they write, a departure from activities run by "experts" and designed to appeal to the broadest possible audience.

A typical summer schedule for the Columbus, Ga., collaborative, for example, looks something like this: a statistics workshop; PRIME, the network's math summer camp for girls; a middle-grades math and science institute for integrating the teaching of the two subjects; a school-to-work meeting for teachers of grades 9-12 and mathematicians from business and industry; and training for elementary teachers in the use of science labs.

"If we provide something and they aren't coming, we know it's our own fault and we haven't listened to the teachers," says Susan Pruet, the collaborative's executive director.

Perhaps more important, the networks try to banish the closed-door mentality of teaching. "It's crucial for teachers to hear about the successes and struggles of other teachers," points out Brian Lord, a senior project director with the Education Development Center, a private research-and-development company based in Newton, Mass. "Tackling decisionmaking under uncertainty is very high on the list" of networks' priorities.

In many ways, the Columbus network is unusual. Although it grew out of the national Urban Mathematics Collaboratives financed by the Ford Foundation in the 1980s, the Georgia group was anything but urban. With $8,000 from the foundation, Mary Lindquist and Helen Purks set out in 1989 to prove that the demand for authentic professional development was just as great in rural schools as it was in the cities.

Lindquist, a former president of the National Council of Teachers of Mathematics and an education professor at Columbus College, was the architect of the network. Purks, its first executive director, was the voice of the practicing teacher.

They built their network from the ground up. With Lindquist's clout and Purks' easygoing appeal, they scraped together enough extra money from local businesses to organize and publicize some events for teachers. Getting the teachers there was another thing. Because the network first covered a 50-mile radius, it wasn't easy spreading the word. Purks sometimes consulted football schedules--the only documents she had access to--just to get the names of schools in faraway districts.

"It makes our role a little more difficult," Pruet says of the multi-district approach. "Things are less centralized." The network now reaches from the small city of Columbus, through back-country Georgia, and even into eastern Alabama. In all, it has members from some 25 school districts in the two states. The smallest of the districts has about 400 students, and the largest, Columbus, has 30,000.

The collaborative first zeroed in on high school teachers, but it has since expanded to include the elementary schools.
Policymakers say that networks are particularly important because their emphasis on the secondary level--not just in Columbus, but in many networks around the country--has touched a population of teachers often left out of major school-reform efforts.

The network called its gatherings "Birds of a Feather," and organized them around such themes as new trends in algebra or geometry teaching. Its leaders joked about the hokey name--later adopted by other collaboratives, much to their amusement--but found it made the events seem less dry and academic than the generic in-service training that had passed for professional development in their area.

"I wanted this to be sort of homey," Purks explains. "I wanted it to be comfortable for teachers."

Other networkers have also struggled to maintain that feeling of community, even as they hope to reach out to more teachers. Dixie Goswami, the coordinator of the Bread Loaf Rural Teacher Network, which grew out of the writing program of the same name at Middlebury College in Vermont, says: "We don't want to get huge, but we do want to be replicated.

"The kind of work these teachers do does not lend itself to anonymous faces sending you messages," adds Goswami, whose network includes about 500 teachers in six states. "We want to keep that intimacy."

The Columbus network became a safe haven for teachers to try out new ideas, air complaints, or talk about the profession. To some, the discussions were a rare opportunity.

"In a way, if teachers want to be powerful, it's their only place to be," says Kitty Boles, a 4th-grade teacher in Brookline, Mass., who helped found a network in the 1970s for women teachers in Boston. "They tend to be powerful in their domain--the classroom. But unless they're with the union, there's nowhere else."

And because they are outside the system, networks give teachers an opportunity to be political about their work--without repercussions. That can be a mixed blessing, however.

"It meant that no particular system owned us," Purks points out. But it also meant the Columbus network had to take care not to criticize districts for the way they were approaching math instruction. "We had to make people aware that we were not trying to take over anyone's job--or tell them how to do it," Purks says.

The central question is whether teachers will return to their schools and use their newfound skills and leadership to mobilize their colleagues. Some worry that networks can create resentment because they set some teachers apart from the pack.

To avoid that problem, some math collaboratives require that 60 percent or more of the teachers in a department join. Pete Anderson, who teaches applied mathematics at Troup County Comprehensive High School in LaGrange, Ga., says the Columbus collaborative has had a lasting effect because everyone in the math department has taken part in the network's staff-development projects.

"Sometimes, administrators aren't sure about all these crazy ideas teachers have," Anderson says with a laugh. "So it really helps to have a critical mass" that supports experimentation.

Even with the unwavering support of teachers in their communities, many networks have stumbled over the same problem:

lack of funds. Networks--including some math collaborative sites--have had trouble sustaining themselves once foundation or other private support is gone. Indeed, some must seek more money from the very groups they sought freedom from, such as the district or state.

"I think one of the reasons things that teachers start don't last is because they don't understand how organizations work," adds Boles, the Brookline, Mass., teacher. "They often aren't financially savvy."

The Columbus network has avoided some of those difficulties, however, through creative fund-raising. The network charges schools a membership fee of 50 cents per student to cover its operating expenses. In addition, the network gets some state and federal funds, including, most years, two or three grants of $25,000 to $30,000 each from the Eisenhower program for professional development in math and science.

The network's homespun approach to professional development so intrigued state officials that they have helped clone it in Augusta and Valdosta.

Some networks have suffered an identity crisis as they discovered that they were focused on too slender a slice of the reform pie. Those groups are now at a critical juncture: Can they find their place in the web of national school-reform groups? Or will they fade away?

The CHART network is struggling with some of those questions now.

Dennis Lubeck, the director of the St. Louis-based International Education Consortium and a coordinator for the network, says the network is getting more aggressive about forging ties with "natural partners," such as state humanities councils and nationally known reform efforts like the Coalition of Essential Schools.

"I don't think people can carry it alone--there's too much to do," says Lubeck, whose network's "transition" talks are being funded by the Rockefeller Foundation. "You really have to be good bridge-builders."

Some policymakers agree that many networks will be more successful when they connect their efforts to major school-reform or restructuring efforts. But they also praise them for focusing their energies on specific, achievable goals. And they are more generous in interpreting the comings and goings of networks.

"If groups start and disband, we see it as failure. But we could see it as flexibility," argues Judith Warren-Little, a professor in the graduate school of education at the University of California at Berkeley.

Furthermore, teachers' relationships last even after the network no longer exists in name.

"It was said early on in networks' lives that they were fragile," says Lord of the Education Development Center. "And I protested. They're not fragile. They're really quite resilient. They change shape to accommodate the political shifts, as well as the contextual shifts, in teaching and learning."

Most networkers see themselves as a necessary part--but by no

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means the only part--of the landscape. Few claim that networks are the only way to go.

"They don't work in isolation: A network sustains what grows out of other professional-development experiences," Purks says. "I don't think there's anything wrong with 'expert to teacher,' as long as 'teacher to teacher' is still there."

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Inquiring Minds: A Virtual Network

By Peter West

The greatest barrier to professional development too often is the classroom wall. Unlike professionals in other fields, teachers' hectic schedules and working conditions seldom allow for thoughtful discussions with their peers in the next room, let alone colleagues within their own states or across the nation.

But as more schools become wired for access to the Internet and state telecommunications networks, and as the number of personal computers in schools and homes continues to grow, some promising new professional-development programs are tapping into technology to provide teachers with a variety of electronic forums to discuss their classroom practices.

Electronic mail allows teachers to share their daily frustrations and successes with their peers without regard to distance or time. And videotaped lessons store the best classroom practices and allow teachers to replicate them anywhere, anytime.

Satellite and fiber-optic networks give master teachers a wide, even a continental, audience of eager students for interactive programs, while the immense storage capacity and global access of the Internet place the best curriculum materials and teaching practices at the fingertips of computer-using educators.

It's not clear exactly how many technology-dependent professional-development projects exist nationwide. But, according to Kathleen Fulton, a former researcher for the now-defunct congressional Office of Technology Assessment, many promising approaches using a variety of technologies are already in use.

In its report, "Teachers and Technology: Making the Connection," the OTA featured several programs nationwide taking advantage of technology to help teachers both at the pre-service and in-service levels. But the report also noted that professional development by means of technology is still a field in its infancy.

"We said it was a recommended area for development and for research," Fulton explains. "How much of it is going on we didn't really survey in any comprehensive way. Like everything else in the area of educational technology, there have been some bits and pieces and fits and starts."

While still very much the exception rather than the rule, electronic professional-development programs are taking hold under the direction of the federal government, state legislatures, a growing number of private concerns, and even individual school districts and colleges of education.

The U.S. Department of Education, through its Eisenhower Clearinghouse at Ohio State University, offers a home page on the Internet's World Wide Web with exemplary curriculum materials and guidance on how to take an on-line course in computer literacy

offered by the University of Arizona.

Another promising project at the federal level, also cited in the OTA report, is Mathline, an initiative of the Alexandria, Va.-based Public Broadcasting Service. The project began two years ago as a means of disseminating effective practice in math education as defined by the National Council of Teachers of Mathematics.

Almost 70 PBS affiliates around the country distribute videotaped lessons of exemplary teachers, either by broadcasting them during late-night hours or providing videotapes free of charge to middle school teachers nationwide.

"They're real teachers in real classrooms trying to implement teaching standards," notes Jinny Goldstein, the vice president for education project development at PBS. "What they're supposed to do is stimulate the teachers to think about their own teaching practices."

Teachers can then take to their computers to discuss the lessons in mediated on-line forums or post messages for one another on an electronic bulletin board. The number of participating teachers has grown from 500 to 2,000 in two years.

At the state level, the OTA report notes, Iowa uses a government-owned fiber-optic communications network to provide professional-development seminars to classroom educators. Texas gives teachers unlimited Internet access through the Texas Education Network, a cooperative venture of the Texas Education Agency and the University of Texas system, for $5 a year.

Scattered private-sector efforts have also hooked up to the burgeoning telecommunications industry to enhance teaching.

TI-IN, a San Antonio-based provider of math, science, and foreign-language classes for high school students learning by satellite, has long included professional-development courses in its offerings.

Genentech, a leader in genetic engineering based in South San Francisco, sponsors Access Excellence, an ongoing forum on the World Wide Web where high school biology teachers can go to find the latest information about scientific developments, hold on-line discussions, and pose queries to Genentech scientists about scientific advances.

The Utah-based Video Journal of Education provides school districts that subscribe a series of video seminars featuring such well-known psychologists as Yale University's James P. Comer and Harvard's Howard Gardner.

And many large school districts are experimenting on their own to find effective ways that electronic media can help them deliver in-service training.

The Los Angeles County Office of Education operates a satellite network of its own that provides teleconferences and professional-development seminars for teachers. And in cooperation with the Los Angeles Educational Partnership, a nonprofit reform group, it also runs the Los Angeles Learning Community Network, a computer bulletin board and e-mail system that makes it possible for some 5,000 teachers to access professional-development materials on the Internet, as well as

social-service agencies and other resources.

Technology has also found its way into education schools as a means of offering professional-development support to both practicing and student teachers.

At Western Illinois University, the college of education and human services uses a video link to tutor teachers and student teachers in the Springfield public schools some 90 miles away. Student teachers also run a video-based homework hot-line that allows students to get much-needed answers by fax from their school libraries.

"Our students are seeing, in that case, low-cost technology used for an instructional purpose," says Bruce Barker, who oversees the program, which has received funding from the U.S Education Department and the Ameritech Corp.

The recent overhaul of the nation's 60-year-old telecommunications bill, which guarantees schools "affordable" access to telecommunications, may also help spur innovation in the use of technology in professional development. A hint to the sort of projects these revisions may foster can already be found taking shape in Maryland.

Starting next fall, the Baltimore Electronic Learning Community will use the Internet to bring huge amounts of curriculum materials, lesson plans, and even video links between classrooms to local teachers. The cooperative effort of the University of Maryland's college of education and the Baltimore City public schools will give teachers access to instructional materials from such diverse sources as the National Archives, the Space Telescope Institute at Johns Hopkins University, and the Maryland-based Discovery Communications, which owns the Discovery Channel. A special tool will allow educators to track down other teachers conducting searches on similar topics and find out whether they have already written lesson plans for the material.

Research is still scanty on just what makes for effective use of electronic media in professional development.

But, according to Fulton, the former OTA researcher, distance-learning by satellite or video link--which generally incorporates some sort of two-way communications connection to allow teachers to accept and answer student questions--has proved its worth in many other fields.

"The research that is out there about distance-learning technologies tends to be more on adults in business and military training applications," Fulton says. "The motivation of the adult learner tends to be different. They're paying good money and spending good time on it." But, she adds, there is no reason the same approach should not be effective with teachers, provided that it is more ambitious than the simple "talking head" variety of television programming.

It may also be that teachers, who generally aren't exposed to technology in their professional training, may need time to learn how to use such applications to get the help they need. An independent appraisal of the Mathline project, for example, found that teachers rated the availability of quality video lessons as far more important than access to telecommunications.

Tom Keating, a former marine biologist who is now a doctoral

student at Stanford University, thinks many teachers will face a steep learning curve when it comes to technology. His experience running a national telecommunications network for 30 teachers at 13 schools creating a high school biology curriculum suggests as much. But he's quick to add that adapting a communications model from the world of science may not be the most appropriate way to infuse networking into daily classroom use.

"Scientists need to be in constant communication to do their work. That's not true of teachers," he says.

"The question is how does it become routine in a teacher's life," Keating adds. "And that's a difficult thing. But I do have faith in teachers. That teacher wisdom and teacher insight into the classroom experience is important."

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Inquiring Minds: The Long Haul

By Ann Bradley

Englewood, Colo.

As Ellin Keene lugs a battered canvas tote bag into Cottonwood Creek Elementary School on a frigid winter morning, she meets up with Don Biery, who seems wound tighter than a spring despite the early hour.

"My kids have mutinied," the 5th-grade teacher tells Keene bluntly. "They hate questioning. They say it's stupid, that it ruins the book, that it makes them forget what they're reading."

Biery blames himself for the trouble his students are having in using a new technique for increasing reading comprehension. Keene offers the teacher, who is heading off to a before-school meeting, some soothing words and reassurance that the students' rebellion might actually mean they're learning something.

What matters most is that Biery--and five other teachers in his school--have been willing to open their classrooms to Keene and another trainer with the Public Education and Business Coalition, a nonprofit organization that brings five school districts together with Denver-area business and community groups.

For the past 10 years, the coalition's cadre of trainers has been providing in-depth professional development using many of the practices that reformers are now urging become the norm for teachers. In some cases, entire schools have been transformed. And the work has been going on long enough for the coalition to have found a strong link between teachers' participation in the reading project and increases in their students' reading comprehension.

The going has not always been smooth, as Biery's frustration shows. But then, genuine learning--for students and their teachers--is hard work. As Cottonwood Creek's teachers are finding out, it takes a willingness to study, practice, reflect, and try again, and to be open to discussing progress and setbacks with fellow teachers.

"This project is about depth," says Keene, who is the coalition's director of programs. "We trust that if you provide good information, teachers can and will, with coaching over time, make it work."

This school year, Keene and trainer Chryse Hutchins will each spend 10 days at Cottonwood Creek--a lifetime, considering that professional development is usually squeezed in after school and before and after the school year.

The trainers give demonstration lessons and meet with teachers afterward to pick apart the sessions; host after-school study groups; distribute and discuss research articles; and conduct field trips to visit other schools. Depending on the day and the

teacher, they also do some hand-holding, cheerleading, and gentle prodding. Schools start by participating in the coalition's three-year Literacy League project, which focuses on creating child-centered classrooms not dominated by textbooks. Then, they can move on to three years of the Reading Project or the Mathematics Project. The programs cost schools $5,000 a year.

Before they visit, Keene and Hutchins spend hours on the phone with teachers, planning their lessons. They arrive at school in the dark, armed with stacks of photocopied research articles, and leave in the dark. Keene leaves most of her materials in her car, making hourly trips to the trunk to fetch what she needs. Hutchins favors a bag-lady style, lugging her supplies through Cottonwood Creek's carpeted halls.

The school, in the affluent Cherry Creek school district south of Denver, is in the first year of the Reading Project. Because of turnover in principals and trainers, Cottonwood Creek's experience with the Literacy League was limited at best. Now, though, teachers seem serious about homing in on how they teach children to read.

Cottonwood Creek is so intent on spreading the fruits of the Reading Project schoolwide that the school pays for substitutes to allow grade-level teams of teachers to attend the demonstration lessons and "debriefing sessions."

"This is the only way to do it," Holly Hargrove, a 3rd-grade teacher who works closely with Hutchins, says of the PEBC training. "If you go to a workshop, you get a big stack of papers but no follow-up and no accountability. You might try one or two things, but your teaching doesn't change in a big way. You can't just go for a weekend--you have to have support."

Having Hutchins visit her classroom regularly, Hargrove says, forces her to be prepared to try new things: "When I know that Chryse is coming, I know that I have to get it done."

Hutchins pulls a book called Coming Home, about the boyhood of the poet Langston Hughes, from her bag. Hargrove's class is seated on the rug in front of her, at the foot of an inviting, pillow-strewn couch. A table lamp casts a soft glow as Hutchins asks the students to look at the book's cover illustration and wonder aloud about its subject.

"Readers who really think ask deep, important questions and get a picture in their heads as they read," she reminds them. "Before you start blasting away at words, you should activate what you know."

The children, who haven't been taught anything about the African-American poet, call out questions. Is the book about a boy who got lost? About slavery?

Hutchins looks over the students' heads to Hargrove and the other 3rd-grade teachers observing her lesson. "Watch what they are telling us," she says. "I wonder if the questions will get deeper."

"What does that mean, deeper?" one teacher asks.

Hutchins explains that the children are asking "surface" questions. "Right now," she tells the teachers, "the questions posed are where they should be--on the what and how." But as they

start building knowledge about the poet by close reading, the children's questions should get more complex.

The Reading Project is built on research into the strategies used by successful readers. Teachers learn how to teach their students to use the same techniques, which include asking questions of themselves, the author, and the texts they read--the activity causing so much turmoil in Biery's class. Good readers also make inferences, use their prior knowledge to make sense of their reading, create visual images from text, and employ a variety of "fix up" strategies when they don't understand their reading.

Keene, who is writing a book about the strategies that draws heavily on her work in the project, believes American schools spend too much time teaching students to sound out words and not enough time making sure they understand what they read. Then, she tells teachers, students hit 6th grade and are handed a five-pound health textbook that they can't understand. And their middle school teachers typically don't know how to help them. Ideally, she would like to see teachers use the comprehension strategies through the 12th grade.

As she winds up her lesson, Hutchins tells the students to mark their reading according to a code they quickly devise together. Already accustomed to using "sticky notes" to flag passages, the class agrees to code the notes with a C if they're confused by what they read, or with a P if they have a prediction to make about what might happen next.

The children quietly return to their seats. Hutchins and the 3rd-grade teachers pair off to hold reading conferences with students. This is the first day that Hutchins is requiring the teachers to actively participate. "They would sit and watch me work until it freezes over," she confides. But passivity is not allowed. As one teacher questions a student, the other scripts the dialogue. Then, they switch roles. They ask the children to explain why they've used sticky notes and how they selected their books.

Molly Newman tells Hutchins that a poem about a deadly octopus reminds her of the time she was stung by a jellyfish at the beach. "This is working for her big time," Hutchins concludes after spending time with Molly. "It's the difference between being an active and a passive reader. She's manipulating the text so that it makes sense to her."

After conducting another demonstration lesson, Hutchins sits down separately with the 2nd- and 3rd-grade teachers to discuss their conferences with students.

Barb Fritts, who talked with a boy who is "wired differently" and speaks slowly, says her patience paid off when the student said the cartoons in his book reminded him of some his brother had drawn.

"The things they said are pretty profound," Fritts reports of her students. "There is less of the casual reading."

"That was only the ninth conference I've done in my life," confides Vanda Livingston, who talked with a boy reading a book about vampires. "My problem is I can easily get off track and not really stay with the purpose of the conference. I felt like we talked too much about vampires. I thought, 'I should stop this. I am never going to be able to bring this to a close.'"

Hutchins reassures the teacher that she did fine but reminds her to close the conferences by telling students that she expects them to write down their thoughts. She eases some research articles across the table for Livingston's consideration. There's a handout on how to get students to write in journals and information on five ways to assess readers' prior knowledge.

After the teachers head back to their classrooms, Hutchins says she's feeling elated about making her "first big connection" with the 2nd-grade team. Most of the teachers had heavily emphasized skills in reading, she says, but they're coming around to view comprehension strategies as important.

As the school day winds to a close, Keene slumps on a couch in the school media center and heaves a sigh. The going was rough in Biery's class, where the students complained vociferously about stopping their reading to ask questions.

"This is the stuff that people who breeze in and teach an in-service don't have to deal with," she says.

Part of the problem with Biery's students, Keene believes, is that they've been used to skimming along and reading for entertainment. Now, their teacher wants them to stop and appreciate what they're reading. It's like the difference between savoring a well-made Merchant-Ivory production and watching an Arnold Schwarzenegger movie, she jokes.

The long day is not over. As soon as the students leave, any Cottonwood Creek teacher who is interested will join the two trainers in the library for a two-hour study session.

Soft classical music plays as the teachers sit down with cans of soda. There are some groans of disappointment when it becomes clear that none of the 16 remembered to bring munchies.

The discussion is wide-ranging, covering questioning techniques, a new bookstore with inexpensive children's literature, research articles, and teachers' experiences that day. There's general agreement that not enough time is spent letting children read--and that it's easier for teachers to ask questions than to give students time to come up with their own.

"How comfortable are we when kids pose questions we don't have answers for?" Hutchins asks rhetorically.

Todd McLain, a 4th-grade teacher who works closely with Keene, reports that his class spent 2-1 / 2 hours on reading today, including acting out portions of a book.

It was difficult for McLain, who prides himself on having an orderly classroom, to turn groups of children loose to invent their own skits. But it was worth it, he says: "It was looking ugly, with all the noise and the off-task behavior. I said, 'I don't think I can do this again.' It scared the wits out of me. But the presentations were all a little different, and every kid in every group was participating. They were great. Every answer was OK. They were very creative."

Livingston also has had an epiphany of sorts after seeing what kind of written responses her students were capable of making to a piece of literature.

"I thought that kids just needed to read and to enjoy what they

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were reading and that writing makes it real work," she tells the group. "But I had two kids who changed my mind. This was the first time these kids had tried, and the kinds of things they were coming up with blew me away!"

Suzanne Loughran, Cottonwood Creek's principal, says the Reading Project is gaining momentum and attracting more teachers' interest as it progresses. By the project's third year, she estimates, two-thirds of the school's 30 teachers will be "on the train."

"Their level of involvement is not forced," she notes. "When we provide the flexibility, those teachers who are more deeply involved get excited. Their influence over their teammates is much longer-term than the effects of a top-down expert coming out and saying that their way is the only way."

For teachers to help students become proficient readers and writers, the PEBC trainers assert, teachers must challenge themselves to read cutting-edge books and to write, write, write.

During her six years at Samuels Elementary School in Denver, for example, Hutchins read The Shipping News, a complex and critically acclaimed novel, with a study group of teachers. Teachers also are encouraged to share their writing with their students and with one another. In the summer, the PEBC hosts seminars and workshops with some of the leading writer-theoreticians of the process movement, including Donald Graves, Lucy McCormick Calkins, Linda Rief, and Shelly Harwayne.

To her sorrow, Hutchins has come to the point where she must wean herself away from Samuels, which is considered to be one of the coalition's biggest success stories. This year, Hutchins is working closely with two teachers who will carry on professional-development activities when she is gone.

Over six years, the school has undergone a transformation from workbook-oriented instruction to an emphasis on the reading and writing process. Samuels students, many of whom ride buses to the school from a low-income neighborhood, write research reports on Colorado history and insects and readily share their stories--including one about adopting a dog from the pound that is "too cute to forget."

It all began, Hutchins says, with a committed principal who understood quality teaching and was willing to support his teachers in getting the help they needed to grow. He bought a bookshelf and installed professional reading material in the teachers' lounge, took over playground duty so teachers could meet, and attended teachers' study groups.

Now, Samuels teachers are regular presenters at Denver-area workshops and "share and exchange" sessions. Margo Rector, a 3rd-grade teacher at Samuels, is so skilled that her classroom has become a lab for teachers from other schools. They visit Rector's class periodically throughout the year, spending the morning observing her teaching and the afternoon questioning her about what they've seen.

Rector's classroom is large, inviting, and jammed with books, neatly organized in labeled plastic crates. Each classroom at Samuels has between 300 and 500 books. Some were bought with a $4,000 Library Power grant to Samuels, part of the national program sponsored by the DeWitt Wallace Reader's Digest Fund that

seeks to make school libraries a focal point for restructuring. The school also no longer buys reading textbooks and their accompanying workbooks, which saves a lot of money that can be spent on literature.

Kathy Dilg, who teaches 2nd grade at Cottonwood Creek, quietly walks around Rector's classroom, reading from the poster paper tacked to the walls. The hand-lettered signs list the rules for reading workshop time and explain how to conduct a book group and revise a piece of writing.

"It's nice to see different approaches," she says. "Her school is very different from Cottonwood Creek, but Margo doesn't let it matter. She has high expectations for her students, no matter what."

When it's time for the day to begin, the visiting teachers melt into the background as Rector and her students get down to work. The students will break into their book clubs to talk about books they've chosen to read and then spend time polishing stories they started before the holiday break.

The lab teachers crouch down to hear the children's book clubs. Pens move rapidly across the paper as they take notes, but the students ignore the hovering adults.

During writing time, Rector teaches her class what it means to revise their stories. In her soft voice, she reads aloud a charming story she's written about her family and the "turkey silverware," a set of flatware her mother bought with the proceeds from a wedding gift of live turkeys.

The visiting teachers circulate and help out as Rector's students set to work editing and polishing their stories about the births of siblings, family travels, visits to the dentist, and other hallmarks of childhood.

When the morning concludes, Hutchins asks the teachers to take 20 minutes to write down their observations and questions for Rector. Later, after lunch, the teachers gather in the conference room of a Denver office building to talk about what they've seen. They ask Rector all manner of questions--everything from details on how she arranges her room to how she sets up book clubs to whether her students' parents read with them.

Dilg shares her experience of writing mystery stories with her students. She had put her writing on an overhead projector to model for the class, only to find that her students started to finish writing her story instead of their own.

"They didn't get it," she confides. "I was mortified. Then I got smart and wrote my own and then showed them later."

As the teachers chat, Hutchins hands out materials on student book groups. Then she steers the talk into how to assess students' work, and the teachers trade information on how their schools issue grades and on how they take notes during student conferences.

What makes the experience valuable, Dilg says later, is the hands-on work. "There are kids right there, and you can see somebody practice what they preach."

Even though her school participates in the Reading Project, Dilg

feels like she has had "an impossible time making a difference" at Cottonwood Creek because her team members have a "set agenda" for the curriculum, teaching units on things like penguins and the rain forest.

"Now, we're understanding how to get away from specific book units and get [students] to read anything, and that they don't all have to read the same things," she explains. "It's starting to click with people how to do it. We're on the same page and using the same language about what we want for kids. We've really come a long way."

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Inquiring Minds: Let the Buyer Beware

The concept of professional development, in theory, sounds ideal: Set aside several days throughout the school year for teachers to exchange ideas, pick up some teaching tips grounded in the latest research, and rejuvenate. In practice, though, these sessions--which encompass everything from presenter-as-teacher sermons to informal teacher-network meetings to Outward Bound-type adventures--don't always live up to their ideal. In fact, they often flop.

Education Week asked teachers from across the spectrum to jot down their most memorable professional-development tales. The essays that follow provide snapshots of professional development at its best--and at its worst.

Coleen Armstrong teaches English at Hamilton High School in Cincinnati, Ohio.

"Susan, that dress makes you look like an elephant."

The teachers in the session exchanged glances of disbelief. Who could possibly say such a horrible thing to a child? Yet, it was there in black and white, one of the stories we read on the first day of an eight-week professional-development course: Teacher Expectations and Student Achievement. The course's main premise was that teachers generally got from their students no more or less than they expected (big surprise) and that as long as we treated youngsters with courtesy and respect, we generally received the same in return (another surprise). How long, I wondered, would I be force-fed such "wisdom" under the label of professional development?

Things got worse before they got better. As we read aloud negative story after story, I couldn't help musing, "Do they really pay people to write this stuff? Is there any teacher on the face of the earth who would talk to children this way?" And: "Why am I sitting here, wasting $240?"

Because I needed three credit hours for recertification, that was why. And the course was conveniently held in-house for three hours each Tuesday at a low group rate.

Plenty of teachers agreed the class was useless. We made jokes among ourselves. "Susan, that dress makes you look like an elephant" became a standard one-liner during any lull in our conversations.

The classes did, we grudgingly admitted later, have some value. There were exercises during which each small-group participant listed things he or she admired about every other participant. For some of us, they were the only compliments we'd heard in weeks. Faces turned rosy with pleasure. Yes, positive reinforcement definitely had its charm.

But I still didn't believe that any teacher would treat anyone this way, much less a child. Until one day near the end of the classes. A stern-faced lst-grade teacher whom I didn't recognize was walking alongside the straight line of her students, leading them down the hall. One bright-eyed little girl stepped out of line and craned her neck to see how many children were ahead of her. The teacher was on the girl's back in an instant.

"You're disgusting," she hissed. "Can't you ever do as you're told?" The woman started to turn back toward the front of the line, then whirled around and fired another verbal missile: "I don't even want to look at you."

The child's face disintegrated before my eyes. But only for a moment. Then she composed herself, and her expression became a mask of passivity.

I leaned against the wall, feeling a pain sointense that I could hardly move. By the time I could react (to say something gentle? offer a hug?), the group was already marching single-file back to the classroom.

How long, I asked myself, would that little girl carry that hurt? How many other times had her self-esteem been annihilated? How old would she be before she learned to see herself as a person of value?

I left the building and headed to my car. All those jokes about teacher expectations and student achievement weren't funny anymore.

The only trouble with professional development, I realized then, was that the wrong people enrolled. Those who needed it most would never sign up.

Evelyn Hersh is a former elementary school teacher in Wayne, Pa.

In a teacher workshop called Enlisting Parental Support, I half listened to a rehash of old ideas about getting the parent on your side--weekly reports, initialed assignment books, parent conferences. One young woman mentioned that she made two positive phone calls each week. I thought about it and realized that I'd never made a call to parents just to let them know their children were doing well in class.

That night, ignoring misgivings that I had nothing important to say, I made my first call.

"Mrs. Cerny, this is Mike's teacher."

"Yes?" The word hung there, hesitating, but unvoiced concerns filled the pause. Homework incomplete? A fight? Drugs?

"I called to tell you about the great job Mike did in organizing the set-up of the room for a visiting speaker."

"Oh. ... Well, thank you so much for calling, but ..." Another pause. Something more was expected, and I understood that expectation. First, teachers stressed the positive. Then, they inserted the "but," changed tone, and went on to detail all the areas that needed improvement.

"Just thank him again for me. The program would have fallen apart if he hadn't taken charge."

I hung up and savored the thought of Mike's reaction to the phone call. Unless his mom spoke very fast, he'd have time to conjure up all sorts of images of the trouble he was in without even knowing what he'd done wrong.

I made my second phone call. As soon as I gave my name, the mother rattled off a barrage of excuses for imagined complaints. Finally, when I squeezed in my reason for calling, her response was a flat, "Oh." Disappointed? Apologetic? Who knows, but it was far easier to work with that family from then on.

Some weeks I made no phone calls. Because of my mood, I sensed the praise might sound insincere to the parents. Or the kids, with their built-in antennae for anything fake, would think I was exaggerating. The next week, I might make five or six.

I'd like to say there was immediate feedback from the calls. There wasn't. A few of the kids mentioned my talks with their parents; most didn't.

Over a period of time, though, the atmosphere of the class changed. The kids approached me more readily, and their attitudes toward one another improved. Parents communicated with me more often and more openly. But I myself derived the greatest benefit--a strengthened resolve to look for the good in every child.

William Scott teaches social studies, service learning, and English as a second language to 7th graders at James Lick Middle School in San Francisco.

A few years ago, I came across a list of America's 10 most stressful jobs. Teaching at an inner-city school was ranked No. 2, just behind urban police officers, ahead of firefighters and the previous gold medalists: air traffic controllers. Taking home the silver was a dubious honor, I guess, but strangely validating.

Stress permeates the lives of many of my colleagues from urban Los Angeles and San Francisco. Yet, much of the professional development we attend ignores this fact entirely.

No surprise, then, that my most memorable professional-development experience has been my least stressful. Instead of requiring us to do more, it asks us to reflect with colleagues about what we are already doing in our classrooms and how we can refine our practices.

Once a month, I meet with the Praxis group, made up of five other teachers, three aides, and a counselor from my school. The meeting, led by two trained counselors, begins with an art activity or some other relaxation exercise. Imagine a group of teachers gathered around finger paints or sculpting other worldly creatures from model clay. This is not your standard professional-development session.

Then we ease into the meeting agenda. Each meeting focuses on an area of concern for the group. We have discussed such thorny issues as disciplining students, cultural differences among

staff, and the difficulties teaching in heterogeneous, mainstreamed classrooms.

Frustrations often outweigh the success stories as staff members share their stories. If there were easy solutions to these problems, the current state of affairs in public schools would be different. However, voicing these difficulties (and hearing others acknowledge them) makes them a little less crippling.

As the conversation progresses, my mind begins to buzz with techniques for my classroom and ways to improve the school community. Armed with the description of another teacher's literacy program, I was able to refine my reading workshop to reach all my students. Despite having two education professors lecture me about wait-time, it wasn't until a recent Praxis work group that I internalized its importance and began to slow the pace of my classroom discussions.

I may not leave the Praxis group with next week's lesson plan. But I do walk out the door feeling rejuvenated and better prepared to meet the challenges and stresses of teaching in an urban public school.

Maggie Brown Cassidy teaches French at Brattleboro (Vt.) Area Middle School and Brattleboro Union High School.

Four years ago, I lucked into a model of professional development for foreign-language instructors. One important aspect of it included assigning mentor teachers and providing them with professional support.

We mentors meet for a seminar every other week where we take turns giving lectures on some aspect of or approach to our teaching. These presentations are the heart of the seminar. Each mentor must choose and think through the issue, figure out how to present it so it's useful to the other mentors, and spend time afterward to reflect on the discussion. It pushes us all--presenters and classmates--to step outside our teaching, look at ways to improve it, and share our work with experienced colleagues.

Several elements make this seminar format effective. First, we have a reason, a time, and a place to meet. In teachers' overloaded lives, it's hard to make time and space for serious, focused conversation about our profession. The seminar serves as our allotted time to examine the practice of teaching.

Second, we trust each other. The fact that we are both primary and secondary teachers, far from dividing us, has pushed us to dig beneath that superficial difference to find common ground. We have found that we have similar approaches tostudents and to teaching. The common ground has made it easy to be open with each other.

Finally, we define the direction of our work together. Paradoxically, even though we are all involved in second-language instruction, language teaching as such is rarely the subject of our discussions. Instead, we talk about ways to work on a team with colleagues, about difficult students and the issues they raise for us, about working with administrators and the public as we navigate the rocky political shores of school change, about ways to stay focused and not to burn out.All these are immediate,

central questions for every teacher, but they are questions that professional development rarely touches.

The influence of the partnership on our work is sometimes invisible, but it extends far beyond the seminar itself. We're getting used to looking at our work critically, trying to figure out how to improve it, and calling on colleagues to help us. Our work together has raised our expectations of ourselves and of our profession.

Cody Walke teaches 8th-grade language arts at White Swan High School onthe Yakama Indian Reservation inWapato, Wash.

My file labeled "Professional Development," collected over eight years of teaching, bulges with glossy pamphlets, mimeographed diagrams, lists I can no longer decipher, handwritten fragments of wisdom that seemed worth writing down at the time. In the margins of my pages of notes are elaborate doodles and caricatures of speakers now largely forgotten.

I see in these papers ideas or seeds of ideas that I have blended into my teaching style: Bernie Segal's "total physical response" made me question and refine my concept of communication; Roger Taylor's approach inspired me to "put the skates on every kid, not just the Eric Heidens."

Thanks to one professor at the University of Washington, I have more ideas for the fetal-alcohol child, of which our school has a disproportionate number. Because I teach on an Indian reservation, I also count a daylong field trip on root-digging, which culminated in shooting a black powder musket and eating buffalo-tongue stew, as meaningful professional development.

A man whose name I no longer recall, no doubt because he was "just" a teacher, taught me more about portfolios in one weekend than all the books I've read or workshops I've attended since. He brought along a large box of student portfolios and let us go through them on our own. Now, when I give presentations to groups about portfolios, I bring my own big box of student portfolios. The students whose portfolios I request feel proud; none has ever declined. And the response from other educators is the same as mine was five years ago: At last I get to see one of these things.

Show me, and I understand.

Professional development, like enlightenment, is not produced. There are many paths, many sources, many teachers--including our own students. As Roger Taylor once said (and I wrote this down): Beware of the prophet carrying one book.

Gary Rubinstein teaches mathematics at the University of Colorado at Boulder.

Professional-development days are times of role reversal: Teachers become students (loud and uncooperative), administrators become teachers (boring and demanding), and students become administrators (at home sleeping).

If a television is posted near the podium, we know we are about

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to endure the least effective in-service imaginable--the video. I resent this medium because it encourages those teachers who too often elect to "make it a Blockbuster lesson." The video usually depicts a roundtable informational meeting where a group of teachers ask the moderator about the in-service topic. The video, with its unnatural dialogue, takes the tone of a late-night infomercial.

Sometimes, we are given an information packet to supplement the video. While watching one video, I flipped through the booklet and discovered a section titled, "Commonly Asked Questions." I realized they had given us the script from which the teachers were reading. I pointed this out to some of the more obnoxious members of our staff, and they began reading the answers, loudly, along with the video. Others joined in, and soon, there were nearly 20 teachers participating in the mockery.

If no video is available, there is usually an experienced presenter. At our last development day, I took one look at the guest speaker and made a quick guess: 68. By this, I was not calculating her age; I was estimating the year she must have retired from teaching. This woman wouldn't know a modern schoolchild if he or she bit her on the nose, which is probably what would happen if the speaker were left in charge of a class for more than eight seconds. One presenter offered this instructional tip: "Don't just lecture the kiddos on Africa. Have them bring in African artifacts."

No development day would be complete without a giant pad where we can write down the results of all our brainstorming. Ideas always look silly on those big easels. There's a law of physics, I think, that says the importance of an idea is inversely proportional to the size of the paper on which it is written.

Most teachers would rather be teaching their kids than sitting at the in-services. The rest would rather complain about teaching than complain about in-services. So why should school in-services continue? Though they fail to educate teachers, they do unintentionally achieve something significant.

Each time I leave an in-service, I vow to never subject my students to such boredom. In that way, every in-service has made me a better teacher.

Nicholas S. Thacher is the headmaster of New Canaan (Conn.) Country School.

Surrounded by a jostling crowd of registrants at the 1970 annual conference of the California Association of Teachers of English, I open my registration packet. In it are a badge and a program reflecting the conference theme: "The Age of Aquarius."

I examine my badge first: "Hi," it proclaims"my name's Nick, and I'm a Taurus." 1970 is long before personal computers, so my name and astrological sign have been handlettered. The calligraphy looks nice, I think. A Taurus; now, staring around the cavernous Anaheim Convention Center thronged with thousands of my teaching colleagues, I understand why the preregistration form asked for my birthday.

This is my very first experience with professional development. I have been attracted to the conference largely by the advertised

keynote speaker, Neil Postman, whose recently published Teaching as a Subversive Activity intrigued me mightily. He will address the crowd at lunch. But first, we will enjoy a morning of practical workshops. I scan the program, unhappily discovering that most of the offerings hold little promise. I am one of two English teachers in a small private high school, so seminars such as the one advising "How To Wangle More Funding From Your Department Chair" seem irrelevant to my professional life.

At last I settle on "Practical Tips for the Classroom." I wind my way into the bowels of the convention center and find myself seated in a small meeting room. Glancing around, I notice plenty of veteran teachers. This seems to guarantee that I'll pick up a lot of useful pointers.

The presider introduces herself, explains that she is with us simply to facilitate the exchange of "hands-on management tips." She starts us off with a bonding experience: We move around the room individually stating our names, the grade levels we teach, and our astrological signs.

Wasting no more time, she sets out the first professional conundrum: "How do you handle a situation when one of your students raises a hand and asks you how to spell a word, and you aren't sure?" A gasp of horror wafts through the room. People step right up to the professional plate, though: You could say that there isn't time for that right now and direct the questioner to look it up on his own time. Or you could ask students to raise their hands if they know the correct spelling. Or you could look indignant and direct the offending child to the classroom dictionary, insisting that he read the correct spelling to the whole class once he has found it. Or write it on the board for visual reinforcement. Around the room, my teaching colleagues are nodding: That seems to be the best solution.

All the way down to Anaheim, a three-hour drive, I have been thinking about Neil Postman, so I raise my hand and am recognized. I confess I'm a newcomer to the classroom. Then, I suggest that you admit you aren't sure how to spell the word either, so why don't we look it up together?

It is suddenly still in the room. The lengthy silence that ensues is a visible rebuke of my first contribution to a professional-development seminar. I am seized by a wild impulse to cover my badge, even though it gives away only my first name.

Finally someone explains, "That admission would destroy the very fabric of the student-teacher relationship."

The facilitator graciously moves things along to a new situation, leaving me in her wake. The room feels palpably claustrophobic. A Taurus, I reflect miserably. What else can you expect from a Taurus?

Curt Lieneck teaches 4th grade at the University of Chicago Laboratory School in Chicago.

Sometimes, I'm lured to professional-development conferences. They always sound wonderful, but like Yogi Berra's "déjà vu all over again," the same curious events unfold at each one.

The stuffy hotel meeting room has too few chairs, so I sit on the

floor with my back against the room divider and open my notebook. My initial optimism wanes when the presenter suggests an "icebreaker." Twenty minutes later, having heard an exhaustive account of all that's wrong with my neighbor's school, I am relieved when the speaker begins.

His first words are always, "I'm sorry, but we're short of handouts." He explains that the airlines lost his other bag, that FedEx went into Chapter 11 this morning, or that "they" (a cabal of inept conference organizers?) told him not to bring any. So he starts a sign-up list to have one mailed to you, but I'm wise to this little scam. We floor guys know that no one on these lists really receives anything. Presenters actually compete to see how many names they can get. Winners sell their lists to telemarketing sweatshops. It's true.

It turns out the handout doesn't matter much, though, because when the lights dim, it's up on the overhead and will actually be read aloud for the next 45 minutes. When the opening sentence contains the words "empowering," "sensitizing," and "impacting"--strikes 1, 2, and 3--I'm out of there, or would like to be, but I'm wedged in by a big pile of nylon tote bags stuffed with exhibit-hall freebies. Resigned, I make lists of things I have to do when I get back to school until the lights come up.

I've sworn off conferences for a while. Lately, I read thought-provoking books or watch good teachers work when I feel I need to. The school is nice enough to pay for my substitutes and books. That's plenty of professional development for me.

Robert L. Fried is an associate professor of education at the University of Hartford in Hartford, Conn.

It was the mid-1970s, when the words "school" and "reform" were usually linked only in describing a place to send bad boys, and "staff development" meant a smorgasbord of unrelated presentations that teachers were obliged to attend several times a year. As a consultant in "community/school partnership" for the state department of education, my duties included being part of the buffet. That I came for free and was willing to travel to remote corners of the state made me a real hot item.

The first few times I offered myself, under a listing like "Improving Partnerships Between School and Community," I looked forward to an audience of seasoned practitioners who would help me spread the message that the schools can't do the whole job by themselves. Here was a place to discuss the need to forge school, home, and neighborhood cooperation in a state where class differences and high property taxes often provoked tensions between schools and towns.

I would march in at 1:30 p.m., with my handouts, overheads, and a joke or two at the ready. No big lecture here--what I wanted was their participation, some real give and take. After introducing myself, I would look around at my audience.

The scene before me was one that any experienced teacher can readily identify: Twenty or so people spread out across the room; lots of empty seats in front, several polite ladies sitting closed-mouthed in the third row; bunches of men in the back with legs thrust out and hands folded across their chests.

It was usually then that the stragglers would arrive. Having been given a rare chance to eat lunch in a restaurant, they would be in a boisterous mood, not a bit guilty about being tardy. Someone would always thrust a head in the door and ask, "Is this the make 'n take session?" and I would stop and point the way down the hall to where other teachers were happily cutting out pictures of bunnies and daffodils and laminating them for their bulletin boards.

In my room, instead of dialogue, I got mostly stony silence or indifference. When I asked for questions, the first one would likely be, "Will you sign my attendance form now because I need to go get my car fixed?"

After a few such sessions, I began to get it: Staff development was not, in their eyes, a time for intellectual engagement. It was a chance to metamorphose into the very students who had frustrated them the most that day. And as their embodiment of the substitute teacher, I was fair game.

Maggie Rosen teaches English as a second language to 2nd and 3rd graders at Glen Forest Elementary School in Alexandria, Va.

Seven years ago, I quit teaching for four years, and nothing has made me a better teacher. Resigning hardly seems like valuable professional development, but I thought I was doing the profession and myself a favor. Cynical, bored, and burned out at the age of 26, I left my job as a high school English teacher in the rural Shenandoah Valley after only two years. I had turned off to students and colleagues and was tired of trying to motivate unmotivated teenagers. In other words, I had stopped learning.

I moved to Alexandria, Va., and began a new career researching and writing about successful school programs. I learned about teachers who cared for kids as individuals within communities ready for change. Slowly, I shed some of my cynicism about teaching and students.

I may have thought I could choose or reject teaching, but it had chosen me. In my years away from teaching, I helped my company start a partnership with the local high school, sneaking back into the classroom now and then. And I began to tutor a student learning English, easing into my current role as a teacher of English as a second language.

I have a new resolve that this is where I want to be. Sometimes, I see teachers who are missing the spark. I tell them if teachers do not love what they are doing, they need to leave, at least for a while. This may be the best professional development they ever give themselves.